

The priest smiled. "Ho then, Friend of all the World," he cried across the sharp-smelling smoke, "what art thou?"

"This Holy One's disciple," said Kim. "He says thou art a but (a spirit)." "Can but eat?" said Kim, with a twinkle. "For I am hungry." "It is no jest," cried the lama. "A certain astrologer of that city whose name I have forgotten—"

"That is no more than the city of Umballa where we slept last night," Kim whispered to the priest.

"Ay, Umballa was it? He cast a horoscope and declared that my chela should find his desire within two days. But what said he of the meaning of the stars, Friend of all the World?" Kim cleared his throat and looked round at the village greybeards.

"The meaning of my Star is War," he replied pompously.

Somebody laughed at the little tattered figure strutting on the brick-work plinth under the great tree. Where a native would have lain down, Kim's white blood set him upon his feet.

"Ay, War," he answered. "That is a sure prophecy," rumbled a deep voice. "For there is always war along the Border—as I know."

It was an old, withered man, who had served the Government in the days of the Mutiny as a native officer in a newly raised cavalry regiment. The Government had given him a good holding in the village, and though the demands of his sons, now grey-bearded officers on their own account, had impoverished him, he was still a person of consequence. English officials—deputy-commissioners even—turned aside from the main road to visit him, and on those occasions he dressed himself in the uniform of ancient days, and stood up like a ramrod.

"But this shall be a great war—a war of eight thousand," Kim's voice shrilled across the quick-gathering crowd, astonishing himself.

"Redcoats or our own regiments?" the old man snapped, as though he were asking an equal. His tone made men respect Kim.

"Redcoats," said Kim at a venture. "Redcoats and guns."

"But—but the astrologer said no word of this," cried the lama, snuffing prodigiously in his excitement.

"But I know. The word has come to me, who am this Holy One's disciple. There will rise a war—a war of eight thousand redcoats. From Pindi and Peshawar they will be drawn. This is sure."

"The boy has heard bazaar-talk," said the priest.

"But he was always by my side," said the lama. "How should he know? I did not know."

"He will make a clever juggler when the old man is dead," muttered the priest to the headman. "What new trick is this?"

"A sign. Give me a sign," thundered the old soldier suddenly. "If there were war my sons would have told me."

"When all is ready, thy sons, doubt not, will be told. But it is a long road from thy sons to the man in whose hands these things lie." Kim warmed to the game, for it reminded him of experiences in the letter-carrying line, when, for the sake of a few pice, he pretended to know more than he knew.

But now he was playing for larger things—the sheer excitement and the sense of power. He drew a new breath and went on.

"Old man, give me a sign. Do underlings order the goings of eight thousand redcoats—with guns."

"No." Still the old man answered as though Kim were an equal.

"Dost thou know who He is then that gives the order?"

"I have seen Him."

"To know again?"

"I have known him since he was a lieutenant in the top-khana (the artillery)."

"A tall man. A tall man with black hair, walking thus?" Kim took a few paces in a stiff, wooden style.

"Ay. But that any one may have seen." The crowd were breathless still through all this talk.

"That is true," said Kim. "But I will say more. Look now. First the great man walks thus. Then He thinks thus. (Kim drew a forefinger over his forehead and downwards till it came to rest by the angle of the jaw.) Anon He twitches his fingers thus. Anon He thrusts his hat under his left armpit." Kim illustrated the

motion and stood like a stork.

The old man groaned, interlarded with amazement; and the crowd shivered.

"So—so—so. But what does He when He is about to give an order?"

"He rubs the skin at the back of his neck—thus. Then falls one finger on the table and he makes a small sniffling noise through his nose. Then He speaks, saying: 'Loose such and such a regiment. Call out such guns.'"

The old man rose stiffly and saluted.

"For"—Kim translated into the vernacular the clenching sentences he had heard in the dressing-room at Umballa—"For," says He, "we should have done this long ago. It is not war—it is a chastisement. Saft!"

"Enough, I believe, I have seen Him thus in the smoke of battles. Seen and heard. It is He!"

"I saw no smoke"—Kim's voice shifted to the rapid sing-song of the way-side fortune-teller. "I saw this in darkness. First came a man to make things clear. Then came horsemen. Then came He, standing in a ring of light. The rest followed as I have said. Old man, have I spoken truth?"

"It is He. Past all doubt, it is He."

The crowd drew a long, quivering breath, staring alternately at the old man, still at attention, and ragged Kim against the purple twilight.

"Said I not—said I not he was from the other world?" cried the lama proudly. "He is the Friend of all the World. He is the Friend of the Stars!"

"At least it does not concern us," a man cried. "O, thou young soothsayer, if the gift abides with thee at all seasons I have a red spotted cow. She may be sister to thy Bull for aught I know."

"Or I care," said Kim. "My stars do not concern themselves with thy cattle."

"Nay, but she is very sick," a woman struck in. "My man is a buffalo, or he would have chosen his words better. Tell me if she recover?"

Had Kim been at all an ordinary boy he would have carried on the play. But one does not know Lahore city, and least of all the faquirs by the Taksali Gate, for thirteen years without also knowing human nature.

The priest looked at him sideways, something bitterly—a dry and blighting smile.

"Is there no priest then in the village? I thought I had seen a great one even now," cried Kim.

"Ay—But—" the woman began.

"But thou and thy husband hoped to get the cow cured for a handful of thanks." The shot told. They were notoriously the closest-fisted couple in the village. "It is not well to cheat the temples. Give a young calf to thy own priest, and unless the gods are angry past recall she will give milk within a month."

"A master beggar art thou," purred the priest, approvingly. "Not the cunning of forty years could have done better. Surely thou hast made the old man rich?"

"A little flour, a little butter and a mouthful of cardamoms," Kim retorted, flushed with the praise, but still cautious. "Does one grow rich on that?"

"And, as thou canst see, he is mad. But it serves me while I learn the road at least."

He knew what the faquirs of the Taksali Gate were like when they talked among themselves, and copied the very inflection of their lewd disciples.

"Is his Search then truth or a cloak to other ends? It may be treasure."

"He is mad—many times mad. There is nothing else."

Here the old soldier hobbled up and asked if Kim would accept his hospitality for the night. The priest recommended him to do so, but insisted that the honour of entertaining the lama belonged to the temple, at which the lama smiled guilelessly. Kim glanced from one face to the other and drew his own conclusions.

"Where is the money?" he whispered, drawing the old man away into the darkness.

"In my bosom. Where else?"

"Give it me. Quietly and swiftly, give it me."

"But why? Here is no ticket to buy."

"Am I thy chela or am I not? Do I not safeguard thy old feet about the ways? Give me the money and at dawn I will return it." He slipped his hand into the lama's girdle and brought away the purse.

"Be it so—be it so." The old man nodded his head. "This is a great and terrible world. I never knew there were so many men alive in it."

Next morning the priest was in a

very bad temper, but the lama was quite happy, and Kim had enjoyed a most interesting evening with the old man, who brought out his cavalry sword and, balancing it on his dry knees, told tales of the Mutiny and young captains thirty years in their graves, till Kim dropped off to sleep.

"Certainly the air of this country is good," said the lama. "I sleep lightly, as do all old men; but last night I slept unwaking till broad day. Even now I am heavy."

"Drink a draught of hot milk," said Kim, who had carried not a few such remedies to opium-smokers of his acquaintance. "It is time to take the road again."

"The long road that overpasses all the rivers of the Hind," said the lama gaily. "Let us go. But how thinkest thou, chela, to recompense these people, and especially the priest, for their great kindness? Truly they are but-parast, but in other lives may be they will receive enlightenment. A rupee to the temple? The thing within is no more than stone and red paint, but the heart of man we must acknowledge when and where it is good."

"Holy One, hast thou ever taken the road alone?" Kim looked up sharply, like the Indian crows so busy about the fields.

"Surely, child: from Kulu to Pathankot—from Kulu, where my first chela died. When men were kind to us we made offerings, and all men were well-disposed throughout all the hills."

"It is otherwise in Hind," said Kim drily. "Their gods are many—armed and malignant. Let them alone."

"I would set thee on thy road for a little. Friend of all the World—thou and the yellow man." The old soldier ambled up the village street, all shadowy in the dawn, on a gaunt,

scissor-hocked pony. "Last night broke up the fountains of remembrance in my so dried heart, and it was as a blessing to me. Truly there is war abroad in the air. I smell it. See! I have brought my sword."

He sat long—legged on the little beast, with the big sword at his side—hand dropped on the pommel—staring fiercely over the flat lands towards the north. "Tell me again how He showed in thy vision. Come up and sit behind me. The beast will carry two."

"I am this Holy One's disciple," said Kim, as they cleared the village-gate. The village seemed almost sorry to be rid of them, but the priest's farewell was cold and distant. He had wasted some opium on a man who carried no money.

"That is well-spoken. I am not much used to holy men, but respect is always good. There is no respect in these days—not even when a Commissioner Sahib comes to see me. But why should one whose Star leads him to war follow a holy man?"

"But he is a holy man," said Kim earnestly. "In truth, and in talk and in act, holy. He is not like the others. I have never seen such an one. We be no fortune-tellers, or jugglers, or beggars."

"Thou art not, that I can see; but I do not know that other. He walks well, though."

The first freshness of the day carried the lama forward with long, easy, camel-like strides. He was deep in meditation, mechanically clicking his rosary.

They followed the rutted and worn country road that wound across the flat between the great dark-green mango groves. The line of the snow-capped Himalayas faint to the eastward. All India was at work in the fields, to the creaking of well-wheels,

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